

3-1-2003

# Dealing with Plagiarism in Online Classes

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## Recommended Citation

Smolenski, K. (2003). Dealing with Plagiarism in Online Classes. *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values* 3(2). Available <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/2003/02/onlineEd.php>

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# Dealing with Plagiarism in Online Classes

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# Dealing with Plagiarism in Online Classes

Posted on **March 1, 2003** by **Editor**



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*"The university at the undergraduate level sounds like a place where cheating is as an academic skill is almost as important as reading, writing, and math."*

*–Moffat (in Maw et. al).*

The notion of cheating is not a new idea as far as college classes are concerned. Instances of cheating at traditional universities occur time and time again, and it seems that every year the percentage of students who cheat increases. In any given classroom, estimates of cheating can vary from two percent to twenty-three percent (Maw et. al). In any class, the teacher should suspect that at least one student will probably try and cheat on an assignment during a term. With that in mind, the important questions are: Can this be stopped ahead of time? Is there any way to "profile" a cheater? Do students tend to cheat in specific types of classes only? According to Whitley and Brown (in Maw et. al): "Academic cheating is systematic across major fields, types of educational institutions, and at all levels of education." Thus, unless a teacher can read minds, there is almost no way to tell who will cheat, why, and what the subject matter will be.

As far as online teaching goes, plagiarism is an even greater fear. Although there is no direct evidence that online teaching increases plagiarism, the general feeling presented by students and faculty is that cheating is in fact easier to accomplish in an online class: "Because both students and faculty believe it is easier to cheat in a distance learning class, results suggest that as the number of distance learning classes increase, so will academic dishonesty" (Kennedy, in Maw et.

a). Thus, online teachers must be made aware of this possibility, as well as becoming knowledgeable of ways to both catch and prevent the act of cheating.

#### .01 **Catching a Cheater in the Act** ([return to index](#))

I teach English classes online for a variety of schools; including Westwood College of Technology, Barstow Community College and the Ivy Tech system. While in the process of becoming an online teacher, I was not made aware that students actually feel it is easier to cheat in an online environment. This is not to say I was not attentive to the fact that students cheat; I had caught plagiarism in the act while teaching traditional courses before. However, if I had known the true thoughts of some of the students who enter online classes, I would have revised my grading process.

English teachers—whether online or traditional—generally assign a variety of essays. Thus, there is always the fear of plagiarism. Online students tend to have increased access to the Internet and its resources—as well as increased knowledge of the Internet and its loopholes. Realizing this now, I currently run plagiarism scans on all of the papers that my online students submit. I should have been doing this all along. It never occurred to me that some of my students could have taken my online classes because they assumed they could simply cheat through them. To make matters more difficult, I had good teacher-student relationships with most of them since the majority of my online students have consisted of older adults who empathize with real-life situations and responsibilities (of which teachers usually experience in multitudes). These factors actually made me think that my online students were less likely to cheat, and I know that I was not alone in that assumption. Several of my colleagues agreed with me. Unfortunately, we were all very wrong.

One of my best “A” students—and one who I had a very good student-teacher relationship with—recently sent me a copy of his draft to look over. I did so, and made a few suggestions, mostly grammatical, and noted that he was six pages short of the ten he needed to complete the assignment. Four hours later, he E-mailed me again; this time, with a ten-page revision. The grammatical suggestions had been ignored, and the additional pages were perfect. Needless to say, this raised both eyebrows—and actually made my stomach sink. I knew he had not written the additional pages by himself—they were completely different from his writing style and I do not believe that anybody can produce six flawless pages of writing in a matter of four hours.

Luckily, I had purchased a type of plagiarism scanning software called Eve 2 about three months beforehand. I had not felt the need to use it until that particular day. I ran the paper through the scan and it came up, as I expected, heavily plagiarized. I showed the results to my boss and it was enough to support my case.

While there are several different types of scanning software and websites available, I have to boast that Eve 2 is probably the best software out there. Unlike Turnitin.com, Eve 2 gives the results in fifteen minutes or less (instead of 24 hours). If the paper is saved as a text file and then

scanned, Eve 2 will pinpoint which passages are plagiarized and even list the website (or websites) that the passages came from. This gives the teacher all the proof he or she needs in a short amount of time. Plus, Eve 2 is affordable—a trial version is available for free, and the permanent version is only \$19.99. Both versions are available via download, so there is no snail mail to contend with. Eve 2 software can be found at: <http://www.canexus.com/eve/index.shtml>.

However, if my fellow online teachers still have a desire to shop around, here is a list of a few websites and programs that may be of interest:

<http://www.plagiarism.org/>

<http://www.4pointgroup.com/>

<http://www.plagiarism.com/INDEX.HTM>

## .02 **Prevention** ([return to index](#))

The two keys to prevention when teaching online are assertion and participation. First, it is necessary for the teacher to assert that he or she will not tolerate plagiarism and teaching. This means more than suggesting it on the syllabus—I usually Email students on the first day of class with my “rules,” and make sure that one of those rules reiterates the fact that plagiarism will not be tolerated. I also let the students know on the first day (as well as a week or so before a paper is due) that their essays will be scanned for plagiarism. This is usually enough to scare the majority.

Another good way to prevent cheating is to implement a participation policy. Make sure the students post to a discussion thread each week; this helps the teacher become familiar with the students’ method of writing, thinking, and answering questions, thus further deterring a student from turning in something that is inconsistent with his or her writing style. As far as multiple choice and true/false tests go, it is a good idea to make various versions of a test—four or so, by reordering the questions, or, if a teacher wants to be even more careful, asking different questions on each version. This prevents students from E-mailing the answers to each other. Also, if assigning a research paper or project, assign it in chunks due over several weeks—this saves students from procrastination (which often leads to cheating) and makes it less likely for students to deconstruct a paper they find on the Internet to meet their needs. It is also a good idea to have students photocopy the first page of each reference they use—this usually dramatically cuts down cheating because students know their teacher will be checking into their references.

For more information on prevention, visit:

<http://www.bedfordmartins.com/technotes/hccworkshop/plagiarism.htm>

<http://www.ctdlc.org/Faculty/TeachingTips/avoidcheating.html>

While it is important for all teachers to understand the possibilities and implications of cheating, it is especially necessary of online teachers. More often than not, the majority of plagiarism comes from online sources that have been cut and pasted into the student's own document. Any student who has increased access to the Internet and online databases, like the typical online student, possesses the increased ability to cheat. Thus, online teachers must stay ahead of the students; and the best ways to do this is to practice prevention as well as scanning all projects and papers for possible plagiarism.

.03 **Bibliography** ([return to index](#))

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### 3 THOUGHTS ON "DEALING WITH PLAGIARISM IN ONLINE CLASSES"

**africa**

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:21 AM** said:

I believe other internet site proprietors need to take this site as an design extremely clean and great type and design, along with the content. You might be an expert in this topic!

**nigeria entertainment news**

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:32 AM** said:

Bravo, what phrase..., a magnificent idea.

**nigeria entertainment news**

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:42 AM** said:

Hi Shane, I've extremely appreciated these articles as well as the helpful summaries that they provide. You say both "the Son is God" and suggest we shouldn't say "God died on a cross." Can you explain? Thanks!